

Side

Brown

The last couple of weeks dealt miles and mounds of retroactive congestive forces, forcing me into a state halfway between sleep and comatose express non-reality where the TV's always on and the show or channel doesn't matter. All the drugs have stopped working and now high pitched pressure drop explosions accompany each little easing of the nasal traffic jam. This respiratory blockage created the perfect climate for the new **Nirvana** album, *Insecticide* (Geffen) a collection of old and rare stuff and demos and other assorted items that go way back in history to 1987 or something. The history part doesn't matter because Nirvana have created the perfect soundtrack to the high-pitched mini-explosion of sinus pressure, and the extra special wreaking, wracking spasms of excess setting new regulations throughout my entire central nervous system. In case you don't get the message, this be maximum rock, the kind best experienced personally, the kind you may not understand unless you plug in your own electric guitar loud as possible matching the volume with your own voice at once summoning and destroying every big and little maddening, terrifying and mind-fucking experience that occurred since the last time you played.

Now some other people may claim all kinds of socio, politico and philosophico meaning behind this, but ultimately it comes down to screaming your brains out by the water heater. At the same time, there's lots to like from the covers of Devo's "Turnaround" or the Vaselines' "Molly's Lips." But those songs though full of pop tinged nuggets and glistening tomes of sarcasm are mere morsels of surface noise compared to the psychic regions explored on "Mexican Seafood," "Hairspray Queen," and the closing condiment "Aneurysm."

Comparatively normal are **Izzy Stradlin and the Ju Ju Hounds** (Geffen) whose debut is something close to the album Stones fans have been wishing for but probably are never going to get (at least not from the Rolling Stones again in this lifetime). Anyway, Izzy (who in case you don't know used to be in Guns N' Roses till he quit) has obviously gone to the Keith Richards school of vocal magnificence which means that he uses sandpaper for throat lozenges. His voice is gloriously shredded, and his excellent band featuring former Georgia Satellites guitarist Rick Richards contributing nasty slide throughout understands the soulful bluesy essence of rock and haven't forgotten the roll either whether playing hard rockers, moving ballads or catchy mid-tempo songs that hold your attention. The band gets tasteful assistance from Ian McLagan on organ, Nicky Hopkins on piano and Eddie Ashworth on mandolin.

Reggae traditionalists probably will puke at their roughshod rave-up of "Pressure Drop," but the heart of the album is on tunes like "Shuffle It All," "Bucket O' Trouble" and the beautiful closer "Come On Now Inside" with the remaining songs on an equally proficient level.

Also rocking hard is another ex-Georgia Satellite, **Dan Baird** on *Love Songs for the Hearing Impaired* (Def American). Baird has energy and spirit to spare, but also a penchant for hick goofiness in his vocals that gets

old fast. Baird knows to keep the guitars churning, grinding and soaring with a deft mix of country and blues licks, but besides the catchy, clever video hit "I Love You Period," and the swinging but dumb "Knocked Up," this is basically better than average Southern bar band music that's okay for drinking beer and probably isn't bad to drive to either.

More impressive is **Soul Asylum** whose new *Grave Dancers Union* (Columbia) certainly is their most focused if not their best album yet. Their influences don't seem quite so disparate and they've melded the sound into a cohesive whole that's not content to sit still, making the transition from the sweet aching mandolin, acoustic guitar and strings of "New World" to the ferociously bitter guitar clash and tortured vocal of "April Fool" totally valid.

It is the acquired wisdom and grace of Dave Pirner's new songs that make *Grave Dancers Union* special. He's mastered what seemed like mere flirting on earlier albums and matches that growth with passionate convincing vocals heightened by the careful and skillful performance of the rest of the group. Making things even more impressive is that Soul Asylum has managed this maturation without forsaking their raw loose vitality, proving that getting tasteful doesn't mean you have to get slick. Instead of going for it, they've hit it making songs such as "Somebody to Shove," "Runaway Train," "Homesick" and "Get On Out" totally satisfying.

Taking a more pure pop approach are the **Rembrandts**, a duo, whose second album *Untitled* (Atco) is marked by tight harmonies and sophisticated arrangements and songwriting. Influenced by the Beatles in a major way, craft of songwriting and performance takes precedence over emotion. Since Danny Wilde and Phil Solem who share vocals play most of the instruments, spontaneity is not exactly a hallmark of *Untitled*, but it's also not what they're going after.

So instead of raw vibrancy, there are catchy and clever songs with inspired arrangements that stay with you. Though the arrangement and instrumental parts are well thought out, Wilde and Solem make the songs come alive with a combination of superb playing and especially their excellent harmonies which at times are reminiscent of the Everly Brothers.

If the songs are at times generic, the group's enthusiasm more than makes up for it. The best songs such as "Johnny Have You Seen Her?," "Hang On Clementine!," "I'll Come Callin'" and "In the Back of Your Mind" show an endless array of musical ideas and once the Rembrandts are done paying tribute to their heroes, they'll be a force to be reckoned with.

Also from a pop perspective, but harder rocking is **Dada**, a California trio. Their debut *Puzzle* (IRS) is reasonably catchy considering the melodies, lyrics and subject matter more often than not are fairly weird. Songs like "Dizz Knee Land," "Here Today, Gone Tomorrow" and "Posters" not only hint at dark humor but cast an icy mocking glare at society. In Dada's songs the lines between fantasy and reality are quite blurred and the singers alternate between sympathy and a sneer. On "Moon," tenderness is fused with anger and rage.

No matter how dreamlike the subject matter, Dada's music is clean and clear whether it's the punchy rock of "Dorina," the ethereal acoustic ballad "Mary Sunshine Rain" or the strangely attractive pop of "Dog." Taking their cues from a wide variety of sources, this is an album that delights in being unpredictable.